

Soul Food Cuisine



The roots of soul food can be traced back to Africa. African slave traders brought foods over to America from Africa along with slaves. It is thought that some slaves also brought seeds of native crops along with them to America, hiding the seeds in their ears and hair. Some of these foods became part of America's crops and food. This style of cooking was perfected during the era of slavery, when slaves were generally given only the leftover and undesirable cuts of meat and had only the vegetables they grew for themselves. Slaves were given discarded meat from the plantation like *pigs feet, ham hocks, chitterlings* (pig small intestines), *pig ears, hog jowls, tripe and skin*. Cooks then added onions, garlic, thyme, and bay leaf to enhance the flavor.

They were also given discarded tops of vegetables, like the tops of turnips, beets, and dandelions. These items can be found in many soul food dishes today. As slaves began to cook for their masters, they added things like fried chicken and puddings. The term *soul food* became popular in the 1960s, when the word *soul* became used in connection with most things African American. After slavery ended, many African Americans, being poor, could afford only off-cuts of meat, along with *offal*. Subsistence farming yielded fresh vegetables, and fishing and hunting provided fish and wild game, such as possum, rabbit, squirrel, and sometimes waterfowl.

Poor whites and African Americans in the South ate many of the same dishes, but styles of preparation sometimes varied. African American soul food generally tends to be spicier than Anglo-American cuisine. The recipes and cooking techniques tended to be handed down orally.

Soul food and health

Developed by rural people who lived in difficult, often impoverished conditions, many of whom had forced upon them lives of grinding physical labor, soul food is a humble, hearty fare. Traditionally, soul food is cooked and seasoned with pork products, and fried dishes were usually cooked with either lard or hydrogenated vegetable oil, which is high in trans fats.

Frequent consumption of these ingredients without significant exercise or activity to counteract the high caloric intake can contribute to disproportionately high occurrences of obesity, hypertension, cardiac/circulatory problems and/or diabetes in African Americans, often resulting in a shortened lifespan. Additionally, trans fat consumption is a known contributor to cardiovascular disease.

Nowadays as a result, some African Americans use methods of cooking soul food different from those employed by their grandparents, including using more healthful alternatives for frying (liquid vegetable oil or canola oil) and cooking and stewing using smoked turkey instead of pork.

Further, certain staples of a soul food diet have pronounced health benefits. Collard greens are known to be an excellent source of vitamins and minerals, including vitamins A, B₆ and C;

manganese, iron, omega 3 fatty acids, calcium, folic acid, and fiber. They also contain a number of phytonutrients which play a role in the prevention of certain chronic diseases. Peas, rice and legumes are excellent and cheap sources of protein, with important vitamins, minerals and fiber. Sweet potatoes are an excellent source of beta carotene and trace minerals, as well, and have come to be classified as an "anti-diabetic" food. Recent animal studies have shown that sweet potatoes can stabilize blood sugar levels and lower insulin resistance

Soul Food Dishes and Ingredients

Soul food uses a great variety of dishes and ingredients, some unique, some shared with other cuisines.

Meats

Country fried steak - beef deep fried in flour or batter, usually served with white gravy

Fried chicken - often fried with cornmeal breading or seasoned flour

Chicken gizzards

Chicken livers

Chitterlings ("chitlins") - the cleaned and prepared intestines of hogs, slow cooked and often eaten with vinegar and hot sauce; sometimes parboiled, then battered and fried

Cracklins - commonly known as pork rinds and sometimes added to cornbread batter

Fatback - fatty, cured, salted pork; used to season meats and vegetables

Fried fish (any of several varieties of fish - especially catfish but also whiting, porgies, blue-gills) - dredged in seasoned cornmeal and deep fried

Ham hocks - smoked, used to flavor vegetables and legumes

Hog maws - hog jowls, sliced and usually cooked with chitterlings

Hoghead cheese - made primarily from pig snouts, lips, and ears and frequently also referred to as "souse meat" or simply "souse"

Meatloaf (typically with a brown gravy)

Neckbones - beef neck bones seasoned and slow cooked

Pigs' feet - slow cooked like chitterlings, sometimes pickled and, like chitterlings, often eaten with vinegar and hot sauce

Ribs - usually pork, but can also be beef ribs

Vegetables

Black-eyed peas - cooked separately, or with rice

As *hoppin' john*

Greens - usually cooked with ham hocks; especially collard greens, Mustard greens, turnip greens, or a combination thereof

Lima beans - see butter beans

Butter beans - immature lima beans, usually cooked in butter

Mashed potatoes - usually made with butter and condensed milk

Okra - African vegetable eaten fried in corn meal or stewed, often with tomatoes, corn, onions and hot peppers; Bantu for okra is *ngombo*, from which the Creole/soul food dish gumbo derives its name.



- Vegetables Cont.-

Red beans

Succotash - originally, a Native American dish of yellow corn and butter beans, usually cooked in butter

Sweet potatoes - often parboiled, sliced and then baked, using sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg and butter or margarine, commonly called *candied yams*; also boiled, then pureed and baked into pies

Other items

Biscuits - a shortbread similar to scones, commonly served with butter, jam, jelly, sorghum or cane syrup, or gravy; used to wipe up, or "sop," liquids from a dish

Rice pudding - rice and corn-based vanilla pudding.

Chow-chow - a spicy, homemade pickle relish sometimes made with okra, corn, cabbage, hot peppers, green tomatoes and other vegetables; commonly used to top black-eyed peas and otherwise as a condiment and side dish

Cornbread - a shortbread often baked in a skillet, commonly seasoned with bacon fat

Sweet bread - a food of Polynesian origin

Grits (or "hominy grits") - made from processed, dried, ground corn kernels and usually eaten as a breakfast food the consistency of porridge, but also served with fish and meat at dinnertime

Hot sauce - a condiment of cayenne peppers, vinegar, salt, garlic and other spices often used on chitterlings, fried chicken and fish

Macaroni and cheese

Milk and bread (a "po' folks' dessert-in-a-glass") - slightly crumbled cornbread, buttermilk and sugar

Rice - usually served with red beans and black-eyed peas

Sorghum syrup (from sorghum, or "Guinea corn") - a sweet grain indigenous to Africa introduced into the U.S. by African slaves in the early 17th century; see biscuits; frequently referred to as *sorghum molasses*

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Sources: Wikipedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soul_food

